

101: POSTSECONDARY DATA

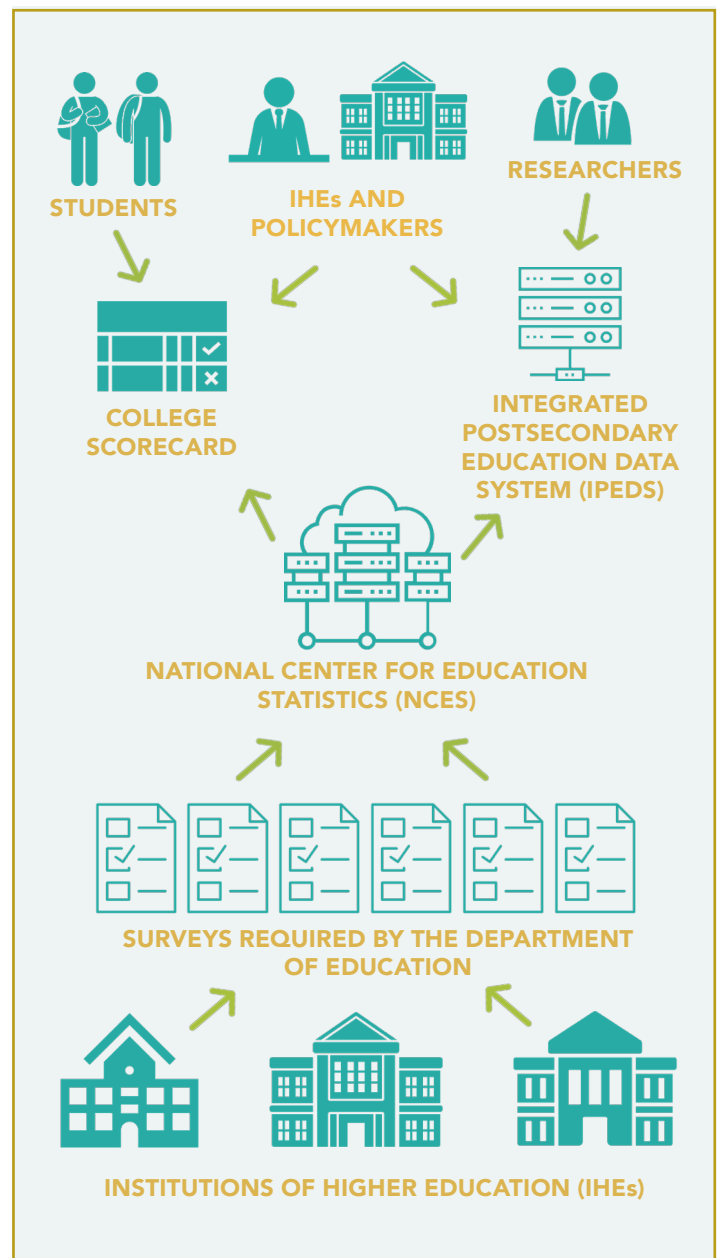


To make informed decisions and choose the educational pathway that is best for them, students and their families need more complete and accurate information about the return on investment for specific colleges and programs. Despite some existing federal data, critical metrics on outcomes, costs, and demographics are often incomplete and inadequate for students, families, policymakers, and taxpayers looking to understand the cost and value of college.

WHAT IS POSTSECONDARY DATA?

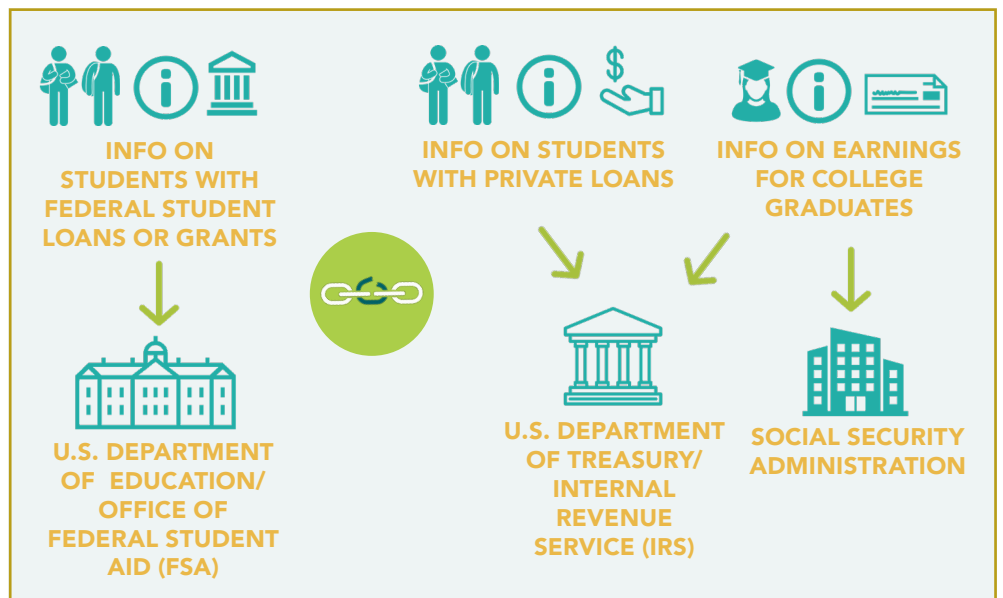
Postsecondary data captures information related to institutions of higher education (IHEs) – including colleges, universities, and technical and vocational programs – as well as students and their outcomes. This information may include institutional metrics, such as tuition and fees, and student-centered metrics, like admissions, enrollment, financial aid, completion, and employment outcomes.

MAJOR FEDERAL SOURCES OF POSTSECONDARY DATA



THE BROKEN LINK IN POSTSECONDARY DATA

The federal government also houses information on students with federal loans or grants, such as Stafford loans and Pell Grants, through the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) at the Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) within the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Additionally, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) at the U.S. Department of Treasury holds information on earnings for all Americans and on private student loans.



WHY POSTSECONDARY DATA MATTERS

Making Informed Decisions: Students and their families should be able to compare and contrast this type of information to make well-informed decisions. Students may not always need to choose College B, but they should at least be provided with clear information so they can make smarter decisions regarding financial aid and set realistic expectations for the type of learning experience and outcomes they will have.

Public Transparency: Taxpayers also deserve to have improved data on college outcomes, considering that the federal government invests about \$150 billion annually in our nation's higher education system. Also, institutions could utilize improved postsecondary data to better inform their own decisions, including whether to grow, reduce, or cut programs.

IHEs and Policymakers: IHEs use postsecondary data in order to help students succeed by analyzing outcomes and making well-informed decisions with regard to specific academic programs, and for financial aid purposes. Policymakers need better postsecondary data to drive changes that improve student outcomes and to measure results.

STUDENTS & THEIR FAMILIES SHOULD BE ABLE TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST DIFFERENT COLLEGES

COLLEGE A



*Bachelor's Degree
in Computer Science*

Net Price:
\$36,000

**Average Years
to Complete:**
5.5

**Median Income
(3 years after
graduation):**
\$32,000

COLLEGE B



*Bachelor's Degree
in Computer Science*

Net Price:
\$12,000

**Average Years
to Complete:**
3

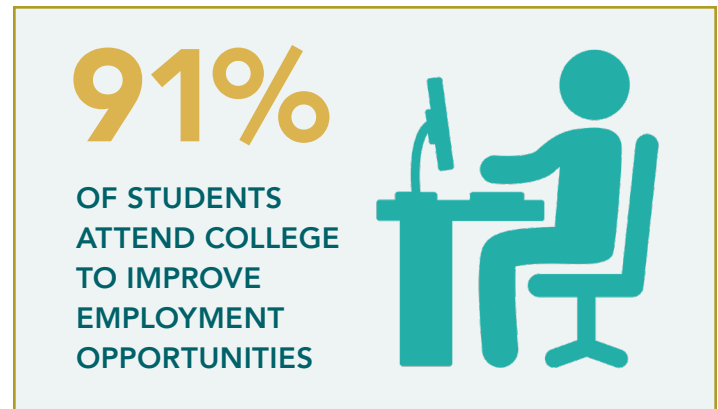
**Median Income
(3 years after
graduation):**
\$64,000

TODAY'S STUDENTS + POSTSECONDARY DATA

Our 21st century workforce places increasing demands that students have a demonstrated skill-set after earning a degree or other credential. Therefore, today's students need to know which schools and programs offer credentials sought and valued by employers and will, as a result, help them accomplish their employment and lifetime goals.

Some of today's students may have a hard time answering the seemingly simple question, "What kind of outcomes does this program have for

students like me?" Postsecondary data should provide today's students with answers about their potential earnings and the value they can expect from specific higher learning programs.



STUDENT LEVEL DATA

In 2008, Congress reauthorized the Higher Education Act of 1965 through legislation known as the Higher Education Opportunity Act. The reauthorization added many provisions, including the adoption of a ban on a "student unit record." This ban prohibits existing student-level data from being used to more comprehensively examine and understand student outcomes across institutions and programs. For example, if the ban was not in place, students and their families would be able to assess expected earnings across all programs, and taxpayers and policymakers would have a holistic picture of the value institutions provide to today's students.

MAINTAINING AND PROTECTING PRIVACY

In order to improve postsecondary data, we must continue to protect the data and privacy of students. For better data to be a viable source of information for the public, policymakers, and IHEs, we must ensure proper security protocols and protect against unauthorized access to postsecondary data. As technology continues to evolve, student data can be protected by the highest quality and most secure standards and systems.

CONCLUSION

The current constellation of postsecondary data systems is misaligned and incomplete, because it does not capture or reflect the reality of today's students and limits the ability of students, families, policymakers, and institutions to measure the equity of outcomes in higher learning. Postsecondary data should cover the full spectrum of today's students and should provide clear information about programs, costs, the likelihood of success, and the potential return on investment. Finally, higher quality data will enable policymakers and institutions to make better-informed policy decisions for today's students

For more information about Higher Learning Advocates' work to improve postsecondary data, please contact **Emily Bouck**, Policy & Advocacy Director, at ebouck@higherlearningadvocates.org, and visit www.higherlearningadvocates.org to learn more about our work.